

Sunday, November 09, 2003

Chaplains forging alliance with local religious leaders

Story and photos by Chaplain (Maj.) Dean Bonura

Since June, chaplains of the Ready First Combat Team, the 1st Armored Division's 1st Brigade and attached elements, located in eastern Baghdad, have been forging alliances with local religious leaders.

According to Chaplain (Maj.) Dean Bonura, "Unit Ministry Teams have made at least 29 contacts with an assortment of religious leaders – from Shi'a and Sunni Muslims to Armenian and Roman Catholic bishops and priests."

Constructive engagement with religious leaders in Baghdad has increasingly become important and vital to the overall success of the coalition mission. Early on in its mission, the 1st Armored Division committed itself to building a partnership with religious leaders in Baghdad to enhance the Coalition Provisional Authority's mission to stabilize Baghdad.

From the beginning, division leaders recognized the significant role religious leaders would play in a mission committed to stabilization and peace for the region. Enthusiastically, chaplains took on the task of contacting local religious leaders, supporting commanders in their contacts, and establishing rapport for further dialog.

So far, chaplains have contacted religious leaders through the neighborhood advisory councils and via networking from existing contacts. The message chaplains bring encourages support for coalition forces, conveys the U.S. commitment to provide an acceptable quality of life for the Iraqi people, and strengthens the commitment to uphold the importance of religious rites and the sacred practices, regardless of religious affiliation.

Recently, chaplains from the Ready First Combat Team met for lunch with Imam Mohammad Adil at the Baghdad University Mosque. Their discussion with the Imam (the leader of a mosque) was typical of many conversations chaplains are having with religious leaders. Imams are concerned for the security of their neighborhoods, quality of life (for example, the availability of electricity), and helping the needy.

During lunch, Imam Adil spoke about his desire to produce a newsletter for his congregation to address "the features of Islamic religion...and the nature of the student's life in the west," in order to create greater opportunities for further dialog among Islamic students and coalition forces.

Not all contacts have gone so smoothly. Despite many efforts to improve the living conditions of the Iraqi people, particularly providing repairs for mosques and churches, there is a lingering sense that the coalition is doing too little. For example, Sheik Hayder Kadhim of the Al Tamimi Mosque is concerned about the use of U.S. funds for repairs and revitalization in Baghdad.

He contends repairing the bridge between Karbala and An Najaf, two sacred Shi'a cities south of Baghdad, would be a better use of U.S. money. He said, "The repairing of the bridge would be a great gesture, especially during Ramadan." He also indicated the need for security assistance around his mosque, another common theme among Muslim leaders.



From left, Capt. Mostellar, A Battery, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery, Imam Sheik Hassan, and Chaplain (Maj.) Bonura, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division.

Contacts with Christian leaders have been friendly. Interestingly, their concerns are similar to the Imams, the need for security and the availability of electricity. Not long ago, one of the chaplains in the brigade met with Archbishop Avak Asadourian and the Rev. Gabrillian Simon of the Armenian Orthodox Church. Both men expressed deep concerns over the security of their parishioners and the need for electricity at St. Mary's Church.

Fortunately, the unit commander was able to submit a proposal for the installation of a generator at St. Mary's Church. Similar projects have been started at several mosques in Baghdad. It is important that all faith groups are represented in U.S. efforts to assist religious leaders.

Despite very positive engagements, there remains a lot to do. Chaplains, along with unit commanders, have many more religious leaders to meet. Particularly challenging is the effort to win over neutral and non-supportive religious leaders. Those leaders must understand that their unsupportive remarks ultimately hurt the Iraqi people and could undermine the great progress that has already been made.

Unit chaplains believe the alliance will help in the long-term process of engendering hope and understanding among all religious leaders, as well as provide for a prosperous peace.



From left, Chaplain Messinger, 1st Battalion, 36th Infantry Regiment, 1st Armored Division
Archbishop Asadourian, Baghdad Diocese
Chaplain (Maj.) Bonura, 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, The Rev. Simon, St. Mary's Orthodox Church

Safety Tip

High Winds

From time to time, we may experience high winds. High winds can cause damage to equipment and injuries. The following measures will assist units in preventing injuries and damage:

Tie down and secure tents, equipment, and antennas

Blowing sand will reduce visibility, wear goggles, increase distances between vehicles when driving

Ensure aircraft are properly tied down.
Monitor weather warnings

Chaplain's thought for the day

Riches of the heart

"Whoever is happy will make others happy, too."
--Anne Frank

Anne Frank had good reason to be unhappy, full of fear, and deeply discouraged. Years of her life were spent in a small apartment, hiding from the Nazis who wanted to destroy her and her family.

Yet even in this little hiding place she had happiness. It was something she had inside which did not depend on what happened around her. She had riches of the heart. She had faith that kept her going. She had love and concern for her family and others, which made even a restricted life very rich with feelings.

It is tempting to believe that we will be happy when we have something outside ourselves, which will make us happy. But happiness is not something we have to find outside; the seeds are in our hearts already.

Oddly Enough

Foreign Belly Dancers Fight Ban in Egypt

CAIRO (Reuters) - Foreign belly dancers are appealing to the Egyptian courts to overturn a decree that stops them working in the country they consider the home of the dance, a performer and her lawyer said Thursday.

Mohamed Ibrahim, a lawyer representing two dancers, Australian Caroline Evanoff and a Russian known as Nour, said Manpower and Employment Minister Ahmed el-Amawi issued the decree preventing foreign belly dancers from working in Egypt. Some people have complained that the foreign dancers take their money out of the country.

This Day in History

Nov. 9, 1875

Followers of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse identified as hostile

From HistoryChannel.com

On this day in history, Nov. 9, 1875, Indian Inspector E.C. Watkins submits a report to Washington, D.C., stating that hundreds of Sioux and Cheyenne Indians associated with Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse are hostile to the United States. In so doing, Watkins set into motion a series of events that led to the Battle of the Little Big Horn in Montana the following year.

Seven years before the Watkins report, a portion of the Teton Sioux, who lived with Chief Red Cloud, made peace with the U.S. in exchange for a large reservation in the Black Hills of the Dakotas. However, some Sioux refused the offer of confinement on a reservation, and instead united around Chief Sitting Bull and his leading warrior, Crazy Horse. The wisdom of their resistance seemed confirmed in 1874 when the discovery of gold in the Black Hills set off an invasion of Anglo miners into the Sioux reservation. When the U.S. did nothing to stop this illegal violation of lands promised to the Sioux by treaty, more Indians left the reservation in disgust and joined Sitting Bull to hunt buffalo on the plains of Wyoming and Montana.

In November 1875, Watkins reported that the free-roaming Indians were hostile. The government responded by ordering that the Indians "be informed that they must remove to a reservation before the 31st of January, 1876," and promised that if they refused, "they would be turned over to the War Department for punishment." However, by the time couriers carried the message to the Sioux it was already winter, and traveling 200 miles to the reservation across frozen ground with no grass for their ponies or food for themselves was an impossible request.

When, as expected, the Sioux missed the deadline, the matter was turned over to the War Department. In March 1876, the former Civil War hero General Phillip Sheridan ordered a large force of soldiers to trap the Sioux and force them back to the reservations. Among the officers leading the force was George Armstrong Custer, who later that year led his famous "last stand" against Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse at the Battle of the Little Bighorn.